Andolan Imaginaries

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Introduction: *Andolan* Imaginaries

Anjali Arondekar

Andolan is a Hindustani word that roughly translates as struggle, protest, refusal, resistance, movement, agitation, and much more. To speak of India today is to speak of a state of constant *andolan*. Large-scale resistance movements are once again sweeping India, driven by the very collectivities that the Hindutva India state wants to make disappear. Even as activists, feminists, and anticaste protestors are being incarcerated across the country, more movements develop in their stead. From the massive protests that spread across India against the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019, to the rousing images of multigenerational Muslim women gathering for weeks at Shaheen Bagh in New Delhi, from the collaborations between queer and trans groups and those fighting for the freedom of Kashmiri kin, to the ongoing farmers' struggle, there has been much to hold on to. The *andolan* against right-wing Hindutva authoritarianism has gone viral, spreading, mutating, and infiltrating all sectors of society.

But perhaps such a rousing characterization requires further nuance, further despair. The ruling Hindu-right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), under the leadership of Howdy Modi (his US diaspora sobriquet)/Narendra Modi, shows no signs of departure, their popularity rising even as pan-

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demic precarity, casteism, and communalism rip the country apart. India remains in the stranglehold of a corrosive Hindutva authoritarianism, with all freedoms of dissent, gathering, protest, reform, consent, religion, and so much more continually under siege. Even as Indians shelter at home (if they are lucky enough to have one), isolate, and increasingly rely on state apparatuses against the pandemic, the Indian state has mobilized that very isolation and fear of contagion/contamination to vilify and incite fear around Dalit/Bahujan and Muslim bodies. The language of intimate violence (#lovejihad) solidifies anti-Muslim, casteist, and misogynist ideologies: we are now asked to fear Dalits, Muslims, and any and all minorities whose bodies threaten to violate and invade our homes and nation. The virus is in us; the virus is us.

What we offer here, then, are *andolan* imaginaries, meditations that move between the heady inspirations of current protests and the stultifying violence of state practices. *Andolan*, after all, is also a movement in Hindustani music, an *alankar*, a combination/ornamentation of notes that oscillates between one fixed note and its counterpart, touching and suffusing all that lies between them. Each of our contributors speaks of sight lines of possibility and peril, even as they struggle to inhabit a divided and ravaged landscape. For Paromita Vohra and myself, *andolan* gardens grow into supply chains that may or may not create food for thought and struggle. Ayesha Kidwai's dream of a multilingual university accompanies the protest dialogues of trans/Bahujan activists Diti and Vihaan. Suryakant Waghmore's journey of caste and voice provides the counterpoint to Mir Suhail's images of fury, joy, and death. Together, we move toward justice. Jai Bhim.

How Does Your Garden Grow?

Paromita Vohra

In 2019 protests began to swell around the proposed Citizenship Amendment Act, a barely disguised ethnic sorting of Muslim citizens.

As the protests grew, so did the kitchens.

Those who entered the protest sites were served biryani, cool water, and samosas. As when you visit friends for a meal, no one who went to show solidarity went empty handed. My friend baked a huge batch of brownies and flew to Delhi with them, to spend a day quietly just sitting at the protest site in Shaheen Bagh. A group of old Sikhs arrived and stayed

Figure 1. Mir Suhail, *I Resist* (2020). 2540 × 1874 px. Courtesy of the artist.

for a week to express solidarity and friendship. They set up a *langar*, a community kitchen usually found at gurdwaras that give free food to worshippers. Langars began as a Sufi practice to feed the needy and expanded into Sikh culture not only to feed the needy but also to join all worshippers in a simple human coming together to share a meal after prayers.

As children we loved going to the langar because it was delicious and buttery, but also it was "home food" eaten outside. We were awed that grown-ups served us. We learned, without it being said, that pleasure was the bounty that joined us, not in lockstep, but in a momentary inclusive embrace. This pleasure was not something superfluous nor an overpriced reward for suffering. Rather, after the lush music of prayer and some of its beautiful austerities, this voluptuous sharing of warm, spongy rotis and velvety dal, and the brief smile of the young man who filled our cupped hands with sticky, sweet *khada pershad*, intertwined hunger and spirit, giving and taking, cooking and eating, making and sharing, pleasure and politics, and selves and others in a fluid moment.

The Sikh group who came to Shaheen Bagh fed people at the langar, in an act of service and solidarity, for three days and then returned home. Artists arrived at the site. Giant installations were made. Stories were read to the smaller children. Videos became viral as an effusion of poetry, older women's sarcasm, and pithy political speeches expanded the world of the internet, diffusing and refusing its binaries with unclassifiable content and utterances. On Valentine's Day, the protestors invited the prime minister to tea, for a loving conversation, an argument of connection, not disconnection. They even got him a big red teddy bear as a Valentine's Day gift. The prime minister did not respond.

The effusion of the protests came to an abrupt end in March, with a miserly lockdown, one in which no time was spared and no request considered. Silence blanketed the days and nights, heavy with heat. Migrant workers began to walk home, desperate to be with loved ones in a lonely time. The government did not feed or accommodate them. Community kitchens and fundraisers grew throughout the country. They were efficient in a way that redefined efficiency as an act of care, not reduction. As the workers reached home, kitchens withdrew into homes, too. Time became impassive.

In the heart of New Delhi is an old observatory called Jantar Mantar, "an equinoctial sundial" that can tell time correct to half a second. It is also the designated area of protest in the capital city and at any given time hosts numerous protestors—individuals, unions, and collectives. During the lockdown, all Jantar Mantar did was tell the time, but there was no one to listen. It was indeed a lonely time.

As the year was drawing to its sluggish close, farmers from the northern Indian states of Punjab and Haryana began to march to Jan-

tar Mantar to demand the repeal of new farming laws that were crafted without consulting the farmers for the purported efficiency of the market. They were stopped at the border, in Singhu, the first village as you enter Delhi, and told they could not assemble at Jantar Mantar. Instead the government generously offered them an empty ground some twenty kilometers away called Burari.

There must be a word to describe the act of giving someone crumbs and acting like it's cake: the farmers called it bullshit. Some of them refused to go, but some thought it might be alright and went. Soon they realized they had been sold a bad bargain. "We have been held captive here, this is an open jail. They say you can go back home but not to Jantar Mantar, so we won't budge," said one of the farmers.

Singhu and Tikri, though, grew into large protest sites. The less the government paid heed, hoping to starve the protest by ignoring it, the larger it became. As more people flocked to show their solidarity, the idea of who is a farmer expanded to include Dalit small farmers, women, and Jats. The idea of what is politics and who articulates the political became profuse as wedding songs were written like protest rhymes, and student union leaders, lawyers, Instagrammers, and pop stars articulated heterogeneous positions in Punjabi, a language often dismissed as "rustic."

Because langars are a part of the culture of the states these farmers came from, they were organized quickly and efficiently, and protestors drew on their networks across religious, political, and market spaces. Those who came to the protest drew sustenance from the giant-hearted politics but were also fed, sometimes even the highly desired seasonal delicacy of mustard greens and corn rotis.

Many who were used to being served now had to cook—meaning men—not just for themselves but for others. As they made round, marriageable rotis, they said sheepishly, "We understand now, how hard the work was for women."

But in fact, even the idea of what is a langar acquired a certain biodiversity, some free association so to speak. In one instance a couple of visiting engineering students noticed a little boy loitering around a *gol gappa* stall. He wanted to eat gol gappas but didn't have money. The gol gappa vendor hadn't made a single sale all day. On the spot, the men decided to set up a "gol gappa langar." They bought the man's entire stock of gol gappas, and visitors lined up to eat a snack quintessentially associated with leisure and fun—an extra, not a staple. Using the terminology of corporate speak, they said "it's a win-win situation," but the bottom line seems to have been somewhere between the spiritual and the pleasurable.

On another day, a pizza langar appeared, created by some young men who didn't have time to make or bring anything to the protest and so bought twenty pizzas.

The protest is not easy because it is lengthy, because it is tense, with the government offering only tight-fisted changes. These are the coldest days of winter, and there is unexpected rain. But farmers join in from other states, with women driving in on tractors, sometimes making new friends on the way. By January there were ninety-six-thousand tractors and 12 million protestors, making this the world's largest protest.

Meanwhile in the forsaken grounds at Burari, something had begun to grow as well: fifteen rows of corn and two rows each of spinach, tomato, and onion. While sitting in, the farmers had found the soil was good and the winter rain helped, so they started growing their own food and set up two langars. Once the weather warmed, they planned to grow rice.

Nearby was a volleyball net. "It was donated so we could have some enjoyment, by a *sewadar*" (one who serves at the gurdwara for no material or spiritual reward), said one farmer. This is sometimes how, contrary to expectations, a garden grows.

Skepticism often focuses on such elements of protest to discredit its politics, as if the making and sharing of food, an activity that messes up the divides of gender roles and of domestic, private, and public spaces; or joyfulness, which messes the line between suffering and desiring. As if politics can be taken seriously only if it is separated from life, the way the government is separated from people. In the face of this fear, this involution, perhaps we understand that every act of nourishment is a protest, an assertion of plenitude in the face of a grudging politics of exclusion, a narrow-eyed commerce of withholding, and an emaciated imagination of what it means to be human.

Supply Chain: All Dreams Are Sincere

Anjali Arondekar

Resilient supply chains will end the pandemic. Protest supply chains will save the revolution. When will my package be delivered? How will my deliverance be packaged? My Amazon-India app tells me my order of KN95 masks has been deposited in Jalandhar, Punjab. Then moved to the Delhi warehouse. No more updates can be provided at this time. Status unknown. My NDTV-India news app tells me the farmers' protests have disrupted the ruling BJP's functions in Jalandhar. Farmers are now angrily making their way across to Delhi. No more updates can be provided. The internet has been shut down.

As far back as I can remember, supply chains have always been part of my political vocabulary. After all, I grew up in India, then Bombay, now Mumbai, in a densely mediated ecosystem of labor and possibility where everything and everyone participated in a taut relay of survival. Strikes, or *bandhs*, were a fixture of daily life, shutdowns of epic proportions that broke down the city into parts and peoples, divided and united by encampments of caste, class, or gender. A supply chain, my poet and mathematician baba used to caution me, was a shape-shifting chiasmus whose breakdown promised revolution, even as the revolution led to breakdown.

Supply chains, these unfolding temporal and spatial palimpsests, have now become the stuff of my dreams. I imagine distributive networks, hermeneutical platforms, and all movements and gestures as focused on delivering systems of a forestalled or even impossible future. A shot in the arm, a shot from an arm: how to envision and induce a different present? A recent circular from the Indian Ministry of Education demands clearance of any scholarly exchange of "sensitive" matters in higher education with foreign collaborators. Vaccinate yourself against antinational thought, the Indian state tells us, and the cure will follow. I withdraw lecture invitations to two prominent Bahujan scholars in India who are understandably apprehensive for their own safety and that of the communities they speak of, and speak to. Yet sensitive bodies leak, spread, infect, go off script, unload their viral messages. We Telegraph and Signal, and links are established.

I spoke to a comrade last week via my WhatsApp video, a Dalit feminist from Sawantwadi, Maharashtra (in western India), who is currently at the Tikri border supporting the farmers' protest (#kisanandolan) on behalf of the All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch—a national advocacy collective of Dalit women and girls. She was livestreaming the endless march of tractor drivers, farmers, women, and children—an inspiring *morcha* (agitation), a chain of loose solidarities, and spontaneous acts of refusal—all assembled to fling their bodies toward a future landscape of possibility. What did she want, I asked? What do you hope for here? She paused, shook her head in amused frustration, and yelled over the din of the protesters: "Khoop zale bhashan—nako aamhala sudhaar, nako aamhala hi dhongi ekta,—aamhala aata phakt paheeje kranti, kranti, kranti. Aahe he aamche pramanik sapne" (We are tired of speeches on reform and hypocritical unity—what we want now is simply revolution, revolution, revolution. These are our sincere dreams). Two days later, she disappeared. Status unknown.

Imagining the Multilingual Indian University

Ayesha Kidwai

After eight months or so of teaching online, there is so much I miss about a classroom crammed full of students—the hubbub of the classroom and the hush that sometimes falls upon it as I enter, students scurrying to their seats, the sounds of pencil cases being unzipped and books being opened, the tentative knock of the inevitable stragglers (who invariably take the beginning of my lecture as their cue to make a late entry), the loud chorus of responses when I ask an obvious question, and the pall of silence when I ask tougher ones. I also miss the gaze of the students—the gaze bursting with a question, the one of wonder, the one that wanders, the one that avoids mine, the gaze that pushes back my certainty that I am being understood, that the subject of the class is part of a larger question that everyone can formulate and deepen. Today, as I speak at the static profile pictures or blank boxes in the Zoom gallery view, and not a sound can be heard for most of the class, I yearn for the communicative events that my classes were.

But that is not all that I miss. In an Indian university, especially one like Jawaharlal Nehru University, whose students are drawn from literally every corner of this linguistically hyper-diverse country, not every student has a verbal repertoire that includes fluent English, the primary language I must employ in the classroom. Many of these silences in my online classroom are signifiers of exclusion—an exclusion that demands the excluded see the plurality of their own linguistic repertoires as a problem not a resource. And that the university's "solution" to this problem through a strategy of remedialization of English is legitimate because the university's ethos is a monolingual one, and its ruling ideology one of monolingualization. The offline classroom I long to return to is sustained by the "communities of practice" of teaching each other that students build among themselves, in which students with competence in these excluded languages (or in ones that link to them) as well as English teach those whom I cannot reach. It is on the backs of these acts of learning solidarity, and the constant awareness of the other languages, that my university's much-vaunted claims of inclusion have been built, and it is in the displacement of that community wrought by the pandemic that the university has dissolved.

As the months wear on, and India's fascist government makes alarming strides in instrumentalizing a single strand of RNA to enforce a permanent state of exclusion in the Indian higher education system via its New Education Policy, nostalgia may proffer some emotional relief, but it does not set the agenda for a future that undoes the inequities of the

past. Although Indian academics have long been critical of the deleterious effects of English as the sole language of the university and the colonial etiology of that idea, the dominant tendency has been one that thinks in terms of translation of texts and other initiatives that facilitate a more efficient segue to English, whose primacy as the only "meaningful" language of the university remains unchallenged by the process.

What if we were to reimagine the Indian university as one where pedagogy recognizes the diverse richness of its linguistic landscape? What would we need to change? For one, a conversation about the various languages in the class and their comparative status would have to be had. For most Indians, this is far from an easy conversation, as we are given to name only one of the ecology of languages that we inhabit as the standard-bearers of our identities. We name not all the languages we know and use but just the communities we wish to be seen as allied with, thereby participating in the denigration of all the other languages in our ecology. We are mostly accessories to governmental practices that use language names as labels that conceal the existence of hundreds of other languages—Magahi under Hindi, Hajong under Bangla, Badaga under Kannada, and millions of speakers of unnamed "other" languages under every one of the 121 officially recognized languages of the Indian Union. A conversation about the different ecologies that our various languages live in is the necessary prelude to even begin considering the ways that the informal learning solidarities that we have so far relied on can begin to be given institutional recognition.

The university is also the only educational space in India whose programs allow—indeed require—its constituents to transcend the bounds set by its official medium of instruction, as the research enterprise necessarily assumes the existence of India's other languages, even though that's primarily because the "researched" cannot be presumed to speak only in the languages of power. There is currently no acknowledgment that virtually every research project, particularly in the humanities and social sciences in India, is simultaneously an exercise in translation/transcreation. So little about that process, its audience(s), and its objectives feeds into pedagogy or syllabi about research methods, techniques, or ethics, and there is no questioning of why the rendering of the research experience into English is necessarily predicated on a near-total erasure of the original language. Given that most Indian languages either do not have a script or are otherwise not written down, could the university not become the first place where they first begin to be, by building cultures of collaboration among speech communities within and without the university? So reconceptualized, the university would be an important stop in each student's multilingual journey, moving her beyond a self that anchors identity to one language to one in which linguistic pluralism and diversity is forever nurtured.

Being an Ambedkarite Scholar under Hindu Raj

Suryakant Waghmore

> *If Hindu Raj does become a fact*, it will, no doubt, be the greatest calamity for this country. No matter what the Hindus say, Hinduism is a menace to liberty, equality and fraternity. On that account it is incompatible with democracy. Hindu Raj must be prevented at any cost.
> —B. R. Ambedkar, *Pakistan or the Partition of India*

The above epigraph sums up the dangers Hindu Raj presents to liberty, equality, and fraternity. Congress, despite its progressive and secular posturing, represented Hindu interests for Ambedkar. How does the BJP differ from Congress on the question of citizenship? The sluggish change in the lives of marginal castes over the last seven decades is telling, and several grievances can be hurled at the Congress's variety of secularism and Hinduism. Besides several material and social indicators, the performance of Congress has been particularly inneffective in dealing with cases of caste atrocities. For academics working on issues of caste, it is obvious that they would be in occasional conflict with the state machinery.

In January 2009 on Republic Day, I was briefly detained by the police, my camera snatched and phone knocked off. This was during fieldwork for my PhD, which involved spending time with Ambedkarite activists who were protesting against an assault on two Dalit teenage girls by Maratha men and women. I was detained when a group of female activists cornered the local guardian minister to question him and pelted "bangles"—causing minor injuries to the local superintendent of police and the minister. Activists had cautiously planned these protests, as protesting on a day of national significance meant risking being labeled "anti-nationals."

Protests were critical events to voice opposition in the politics of Marathwada. While marginal castes protested for dignity and land rights regularly, there were occasional Brahmins who protested against cow slaughter—one of them even climbed a tree in front of the district collector's office and threatened suicide. Ambedkarite activists made fun of such protests, but cow activists were never seen as antinationals. The nationalist orientation of cow activists and the advanced nature of Hindu Raj were affirmed with the BJP's return to power at the center as well as in the state of Maharashtra in 2014. The nationalist Hinduism of the BJP significantly altered the meaning of protests and dissent, and universities too were engulfed in the politics that ensued.

Hindu Raj Becomes a Fact

The imagined collective of Hindus came to embody a nation that turned Hindus into authentic citizens. The procedural democracy under Congress paved the way for Hindu democracy as procedures and laws were actively rewritten to uphold caste-Hindu supremacy. The success and achievement of Hindu democracy also meant new ideas of science, truth, and citizenship. The cow was now at the center of state policy and politics. Prime Minister Narendra Modi began his first term claiming that plastic surgery and genetic science existed in ancient India. When the head of a nation elected through democratic means celebrates irrationality and myth as science, academics (both natural and social sciences) bear the moral burden of defending science and rationality both inside and outside the classrooms. I used the discourse of science and society as circulated by BJP leaders and workers to help students think about the nature of collective conscience that Hindu Raj constructs and its dangers for individual liberty and gender justice.

That the Hindu Raj of the BJP would come down heavily on anti-caste activists, especially committed and significant Ambedkarites, was expected. In university spaces, Rohith Vemula was the first victim of state excesses and irrationality. Rohith, an Ambedkarite student activist, was driven to suicide by political meddling in the affairs of the Hyderabad Central University (HCU). Protests ensued across campuses against the happenings at HCU and Jawaharlal Nehru University, and at my former employer, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. As the vice president of the Schedule Caste-Scheduled Tribe (SC-ST) Association, I had organized a protest against the institutional murder of Vemula and had penned an article entitled "Rohith Vemula and the Holy Cow" in the *Indian Express*.[1]

Limits of Hindu Rashtra

That Hindus and Hinduism need saving has now become common knowledge, and politicians and spiritual gurus are mobilizing to rediscover the roots of a "great" past to celebrate the present and ensure a glorious Hindu future. One of my research projects also gave me an opportunity to work closely with Hindutva activists and gain insights into their volunteerism and commitment to the construction of Hindu unity beyond caste. In the making is a new, sublated Hinduism that seeks to debunk Ambedkar's ideas of Hinduism, so as to construct a new, inclusive Hinduism. However, caste continues to constitute the metaphysics of Hinduism, and the older values of hierarchy continue to affect marginal castes in Hindutva.

The centrality of the cow in governing the nation and the construction of the Muslim other along with the arbitrary nature of laws (e.g., Citizen Amendment Act [CAA]) call for instilling values of compassion, science,

and reason in the younger generation. Blending these values with progressive tradition is the challenge for the younger generation, and I find that teaching engineering students sociology is one of the most rewarding means of engaging in this exercise. Along with other passionate Ambedkarites I have also started a children's library in my village Kallotti in the state of Karnataka.

We are in some ways at a hopeless juncture, and the BJP and Hindutva are not the only reasons for the disarray. I consistently look for hope in politics and struggle at the margins. The change in state government and the arrival of Shiv Sena in Maharashtra have brought a greater margin of liberty for progressive forces in Maharashtra. Despite its Marathi chauvinism and Hindutva rhetoric, Shiv Sena is increasingly resorting to Bahujan-Hindutva, which is far more inclusive and amenable to public reason.

Conservative forces across parties tend to draw from unlimited reserves of regressive ideas and ideals that are all pervasive in Indian society and culture. Much before the BJP came to power, I have been arguing about the nature of illiberal democracy in India and the problem of civility, and the BJP's coming to power has exacerbated the crisis of civility, as protestors run the risk of being labeled antinationals.[2] The success of India's democracy depends on the reclaiming of political power by progressive marginal groups across social location and the political spectrum. Despite the pressures and culture of fear, scholars and academics have a limited but critical role—they have a choice to turn their disciplines into bureaucratic ventures or into a science with significant public consequence. I have mostly opted for the latter.

Dialogue's Protest: Ditilekha Sharma in Conversation with Vihaan Vee

Ditilekha Sharma and Vihaan Vee

Ditilekha Sharma: We are living in a moment in history when the world is on the verge of destruction from capitalist patriarchy and, in the case of India, right-wing Hindu fundamentalism. However, it is also a moment when we are witnessing a spirit of resilience. People across various margins are resisting the fascist regime. What do you think has made everyone, including you, step out when the resistance seems almost futile?

Vihaan Vee: My experiences of caste and gender have shaped my ideological location as a queer feminist Ambedkarite trans man. The history left

behind by Babasaheb Ambedkar, Savitri Bai, Jyotiba Phule, Birsa Munda, and Fatima taught me that resistance is never futile, and I have to stand up against injustice and raise my voice.

Centuries of oppression and a history of divide and rule have ensured that different marginalized groups are pitted against each other and protest for their rights in isolation only when issues impacted us directly. This was also evident in recent times, when the Transgender Act divided trans persons or the CAA and National Register of Citizens (NRC) pitted people from the Namashudras community against Muslims. National leaders have used programs like Maan Ki Baat (Conversations from the Heart) as mouthpieces to propagate their divisive agendas. Our leaders, Kashiram and Babasaheb, had expressed anxiety against such leadership. Kashiram[3] wrote about the importance of distinguishing dependent leaders who do not encourage the agency needed to counter structural oppression from independent leaders who work toward promoting a free ideology. Babasaheb,[4] too, expressed that in politics, *bhakti* or hero worship would lead to eventual dictatorship. Today we see their fears materializing. In the name of strong leadership, a majoritarian rule has established itself in the country, with no official opposition party in Parliament.

Initially, I also joined the movement space for issues that impacted me. However, I believe that in the last couple of years, many of us are realizing that our identities are not so segregated.

DS: In my ten years of living on the campus as a student, I had realized that even the small campus of four thousand students was fragmented into myriad silos. The feminists, the queers, the Ambedkarites, the leftists, the students from the Northeast all remain in their own cliques and raise their own issues. However, during the 120-day protest in 2018–19 when students sat blocking the main gate over issues of the fee hike and scholarship cut, the space changed. In this protest space emerged the *Velivada*,[5] where students across ideologies and identities not only came together to share protest strategies but also spent days and nights sharing their beliefs, prejudices, and life stories. Intimacies were formed through shared vulnerabilities.

VV: However, it is this consciousness building among the minorities that is scary to those in positions of power. Babasaheb said that Indian nationalism is defined such that monopolizing of power by the majority is called nationalism and any claim of sharing power by the minorities is seen as communalism. As consciousness building in minority and marginalized communities is taking place, it is being perceived as a threat to nationalism. Hence active steps are being taken to curb consciousness building through attacks on education institutions via removal of reservations and scholarships and through physical attacks on students.

DS: While it was inspirational to be part of these protests, it was also scary. As more of our friends and comrades were incarcerated, we became filled with a sense of dejection. We also need to acknowledge that we had the privilege to separate ourselves from the protest sites at times, at least physically. But even as we left the site, we carried with us the dialogues that had been generated in these spaces of resistance. The Shaheen Bagh *rasta roko* turned a Muslim ghetto into a center of dialogue, where queer folx, feminists, leftists, liberals, anticaste groups, and students from the Northeast came and shared how the issues affected them differently.

This for me is a moment of dialogical resistance. Dialogical because the space that was being created saw a coming together of commonalities as well as differences. Dialogue may not always lead to understanding the other's position, but it aims to produce an acceptance of the other whom we fail to understand.[6] I remember that during the university protests there were several times we could not come to an agreement on protest strategies; however, we did come to accept each other's locations and marginalities. Understand how while the same structures oppressed us, they did so in different ways. Shaheen Bagh and the other protest sites created a similar dialogical resistance, through the innumerable speeches, the night classes, and the community libraries.

VV: I agree with what you are saying. I think these dialogues have given us an insight into the culture, identity, and perspectives of the "other." I remember, during the university protests, as we sat talking about our lives, one of our *saathis* mentioned that before the protest he was not aware of queer people's issues and shared about his past queer-negative actions. This protest started a reflective process in each one of us.

DS: However, I would be wary to call this a moment of some great coming together. There is a continuous challenge to this dialogue building. Dialogue needs the presence of some degree of resistance, and resistance makes dialogue operative.[7] As such these protests are also becoming sites of education, outside the universities, which have been critiqued as citadels of capitalist caste patriarchy.

At the same time, religion was successfully being used as a tool for divisive politics. During the CAA-NRC protests, constant labor was enacted by people from the margins to not be sucked into this divisive politics and to articulate this as not just a problem for the Muslim community.

VV: Babasaheb had said that Hinduism is incompatible with democracy.[8] He had proposed Buddha's idea of *maitri* as the fraternity principle that would help us understand pain, sorrow, hurt, and need for each other and come together to fight against the Hindu Rashtra.[9] *Maitri* is what keeps me

Figure 2. Mir Suhail, *Mother, They Write Poems* (2018). 2600 × 2100px. Courtesy of the artist.

going. Babasaheb said, "Ours is a battle not for wealth, nor for power, ours is a battle for freedom for reclamation of human personality."[10] For me it is a battle for the assertion of our identities, our voices, and the achievement of social democracy.

DS: Perhaps that is why writing a dialogical piece also becomes a resistance against liberal academia, which imagines coherence as a singular idea, thought, or ideology. A dialogical piece that captures commonalities as well as differences becomes a part of the resistance, reimagining a world that is based on a principle of not only merely tolerating or understanding difference but also accepting and making knowledge out of the difference despite not understanding it.

Anjali Arondekar is associate professor of feminist studies and founding codirector, Center for South Asian Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz. Her research engages the poetics and politics of sexuality, caste, and historiography. She is the author of *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (2009) and *Abundance: Sexuality, Historiography, Geopolitics* (forthcoming).

Ayesha Kidwai is professor of linguistics at Jawaharlal Nehru University and an activist in the movements against neoliberal Hindutva's destruction of the public university.

Ditilekha Sharma (he/they) is a trans masculine person who has been involved with queer, feminist, and student movements. Diti is a researcher who looks at academics and activism as informing each other intrinsically; their work focuses on gender, nationalism, queer politics, and inclusive education.

Mir Suhail is a political cartoonist and illustrator based in New York City. He is from Indian-occupied Kashmir, where he grew up and started his political cartooning career drawing for a local daily at the age of fourteen. He has since drawn cartoons for leading print and digital news media, magazines, publishers, and nonprofit organizations in the Indian subcontinent and internationally including for CNN-News 18, *Caravan Magazine*, Amnesty International, Action Aid, and Save the Children. His work has been profiled in *Raiot*, BBC, and *Al-Jazeera English*, among other publications.

Vihaan Vee is a queer, feminist Ambedkarite trans man who has been involved with queer, feminist, and anticaste movements. He completed his master's in social work from the Tata Institute of Social Work.

Paromita Vohra is a filmmaker, writer, and dedicated *antakshari* player. She has made several landmark documentaries and is the founder and creative director of Agents of Ishq, India's popular website about sex, love, and desire.

Suryakant Waghmore is associate professor of sociology at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay. He is author of *Civility against Caste* (2013) and coeditor of *Civility in Crisis* (2020).

Notes

1. Waghmore, "Rohith Vemula and the Holy Cow."

2. See Waghmore, *Civility against Caste*; Waghmore and Gorringe, *Civility in Crisis*.

3. Ram, *The Chamcha Age*.

4. Ambedkar, Constitution Assembly speech.

5. Telegu word that means "Dalit ghetto." The word became part of anti-caste student protests after a *Velivada* was erected at the University of Hyderabad as a temporary structure with portraits of anti-caste leaders after Rohith Vemula and his friends were evacuated from their hostel in 2016.

6. Foster, "Toward a Pedagogy."

7. Foster, "Toward a Pedagogy."

8. Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 358.

9. Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*.

10. Ambedkar, All-India Depressed Classes Conference.

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